

REMARKS

Claims 1, 7, 8, 18, 24, and 25 remain pending in this application. Claims 2-6, 9-17, 19-23 and 26-48 have been withdrawn from further consideration, without prejudice, as being drawn to non-elected inventions or species. Claims 1, 7, and 18 have been amended in this Reply.

Support for the amendments may be found in the originally filed specification, claims, and figures. No new matter has been introduced by these amendments. For example, support for the amendments can be found at paragraph [0084] of this published application. Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 1, 7, 18, and 24

Claims 1, 7, 18, and 24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brandt (US 5,892,905) in view of McCaslin (US 6,868,397). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Brandt in view of McCaslin fails to disclose at least the following claim elements as recited in claim 1:

tracking rental equipment inventory information including the number of pieces of rental equipment available for in-town rental and the number of pieces of rental equipment in-town but not available for rental for each rental location for managing rental equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations;

wherein the rental equipment inventory information for each rental location is accessible via the network by all of the other rental locations on the network.

Brandt in view of McCaslin fails to disclose at least the following claim elements as recited in claim 18:

tracking rental equipment inventory information including the number of pieces of rental equipment available for in-town rental and the number of pieces of rental equipment in-town but not available for rental for each rental location for managing rental equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations; and

making the reservation information and the rental equipment inventory information for each rental location accessible via a computer network by all of the other rental locations of the plurality of locations.

In Brandt, process step 2020 “is an activity program which determines if a car is available to fill the reservation.”¹ However, Brandt specifies that “no WWW APIs used” in process step 2020.² Thus, Brandt teaches away from having process step 2020 use the WWW API for determining car availability. As such, Brandt fails to disclose “wherein the rental equipment inventory information for each rental location is accessible via the network by all of the other rental locations on the network” as recited in claim 1 (and claims 7 and 8, which depend from claim 1) and “making the reservation information and the rental equipment inventory information for each rental location accessible via a computer network by all of the other rental locations of the plurality of locations” as recited in claim 18 (and claim 24, which depends from claim 18).

McCaslin is directed to a very different purpose than Applicants’ invention. McCaslin allows a central hub or location to fill the orders from various other locations (service centers) that are requesting equipment from the central hub (central inventory location).³ Specifically, McCaslin is directed to an information system for tracking, monitoring and evaluating equipment inventory used by electric utility distribution companies.⁴ This system addresses the problem of tracking equipment inventory in order to fill orders from a central inventory location and to retrieve equipment back to the central inventory location.⁵ First, McCaslin does not disclose tracking the number of pieces of rental equipment available for in-town rental and the number of pieces of rental equipment in-town but not available for rental. Second, McCaslin fails to disclose tracking rental equipment inventory information. Third, McCaslin fails to disclose tracking rental equipment inventory information for each rental location for managing rental equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations. Rather, McCaslin does the opposite of tracking rental equipment inventory information for each rental location (allegedly each service center). In McCaslin, the tracking of the inventory information is for the central hub and not each service center.⁶

¹ Brandt, column 23, lines 19-20.

² Brandt, Figure 23.

³ McCaslin, column 16, lines 3-7.

⁴ McCaslin, column 1, lines 1-34.

⁵ McCaslin, column 8, line 64 to column 9, line 5, and FIG. 5.

⁶ McCaslin, column 16, lines 3-7.

Thus, McCaslin fails to disclose “tracking rental equipment inventory information including the number of pieces of rental equipment available for in-town rental and the number of pieces of rental equipment in-town but not available for rental for each rental location for managing rental equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations” as recited in claim 1 (and claims 7 and 8, which variously depend from claim 1) and claim 18 (and claim 24, which variously depends from claim 18).

Thus, claims 1, 7, 18, and 24 are patentable over Brandt in view of McCaslin.

Response to Examiner’s Official Notice

The Examiner previously took official notice that equipment management systems are used in auto rental locations that manage equipment availability. The Examiner cites applications by Williams (US 2003/0149600A1) and Yamaguchi et al. (US 2002/0087334A1) as evidence supporting this official notice. Applicants respectfully submit, however, that the cited evidence does not support the Examiner’s rejections.

As Applicants have previously discussed, the inventory at a car rental location remains relatively static because the vast majority of car rental transactions involve the customer picking up a car at a location and returning the car to the same location. This is true notwithstanding the fact that car rental companies previously have allowed customers to rent a car at one location and return it to another. Thus, rental car companies historically have not had a need for each rental location to track equipment inventory at other rental locations. Neither Williams nor Yamaguchi et al. teaches or suggests anything to the contrary.

Yamaguchi Reference

Yamaguchi et al. is directed to a method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device. Yamaguchi et al. does not discuss vehicle rental methods other than to observe that “[i]t is possible, in the case of a car or truck rental, for a customer to rent the vehicle in one location and return it to a different location.” See paragraph [008]. While Yamaguchi et al. recognizes this possibility, nothing in that reference rebuts Applicants observations that such transactions are not the norm for the rental car business and that rental car companies therefore have not had a need to track equipment inventory

information for each of a plurality of rental locations and to make that information is accessible by all of the other rental locations of the plurality.

Williams Reference

Williams is directed to a computer method and system for reserving an item such as a vehicle rental. Like Yamaguchi et al., Williams recognizes that a car rental customer can choose to return a vehicle to a different location than the pick-up location. See paragraph [008]. Again, however, nothing in Williams suggests a need by the rental car industry to track this information for a plurality of rental locations to manage equipment availability at the locations.

Rose Reference

The Examiner also takes official notice that displaying information pertaining to a plurality of customer reservations is well known as evident by Rose (U.S. Patent No. 7,069,228). Applicants respectfully submit, however, that the cited evidence does not support the Examiner's rejections.

Rose discloses an internet based reservation system. Claim 2 in Rose discloses a time-slot display means for displaying available time-slots corresponding to tables at the restaurant. But Rose fails to teach or suggest a display means related to "displaying a reservation summary having reservation information pertaining to the type of rental equipment reserved and the date of reservation for a plurality of customer reservations" as recited in claim 1 and "displaying on a screen in communication with a computer a reservation summary having reservation information pertaining to the type of rental equipment reserved and the date of reservation for a plurality of customer reservations" as recited in claim 18.

Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1, 7, 18 and 24 are patentable over Brandt and McCaslin, taken either alone or in combination.

Claims 8 and 25

Claims 8 and 25 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brandt in view of McCaslin and further in view of Craig (US 6,266,277). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

In light of the foregoing remarks in connection with claim 1 (from which claim 8 variously depends) and claim 18 (from which claim 25 variously depends), Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection and requests reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection.

Furthermore, each of claims 8 and 25 is directed to a method of rental equipment management that includes the step of updating reservation information and equipment information regularly and alerting the user upon the detection of an update failure.

Applicants previously argued that it is improper to combine Craig with either Brandt or McCaslin. Craig does not address reservation information or equipment tracking, does not disclose a reservation summary or fields for reservation information or equipment tracking and is not concerned with the problem of managing equipment availability at a plurality of rental locations. Although the Examiner does not appear to dispute this, he has maintained the rejection, concluding that it would have been obvious to combine the teachings of Craig with Brandt and McCaslin to provide update alert failure notifications because such notifications “allow the user to determine when updates have problems.” Applicants respectfully disagree.

Craig is directed to a method of controlling the operation of a memory system. Nothing in Craig discusses or suggests the applicability of this method to a reservation and equipment management system.

In any event, even if it were proper to combine Craig with Brandt and McCaslin, Applicants respectfully submit that the proposed combination does not render claims 8 and 25 unpatentable. Craig does not cure the deficiencies of Brandt and McCaslin discussed above. For example, Craig does not teach or suggest tracking equipment inventory information for each of a plurality of rental locations for managing equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations. Thus, the combination of Brandt, McCaslin and Craig does not teach or suggest the elements of claims 8 and 25.

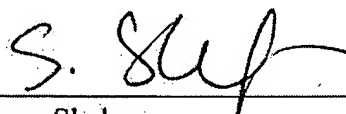
Applicants respectfully submit, therefore, that claims 8 and 25 are patentable over Brandt, McCaslin and Craig, taken either alone or in combination.

Conclusion

Thus, the Applicant respectfully submits that the subject application is in condition for allowance. Reconsideration of the application is thus requested. Applicant invites the Office to telephone the undersigned attorney if he or she has any questions whatsoever regarding this Response or the subject application in general.

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Shahpar', written over a horizontal line.

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